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ABSTRACT

The nine guidelines offered in this paper serve as suggestions to teachers and other concerned individuals who want to ensure that the curricular materials at all educational levels are free of unnecessary stereotypes and bias. Adapted from criteria offered by the National Center on Education Media and Materials, the guidelines apply to illustrations, photographs, and printed materials that portray common themes that are stereotyped, such as aging, physical and psychological handicaps, religious minorities, and ethnic, racial, and sexual identity. The discussion under each guideline contains examples of how to apply the guideline and data in support of the guideline. (RL)

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Be Aware of Stereotypes and Bias When Developing and Evaluating Curricular Materials

Introduction:

In truth there are no neutral conventions in language any more than there are "neutral" photographs. The framing of a shot, the angle, the conscious control to open the shutter now and not later, the choice of settings, film and lighting--all of these guarantee that a photograph will be influenced by human judgment. So it is with language (Brown, 1975, p.23).

As the Carnegie Quarterly (1974) so aptly states:

Children learn their place in the world not just from their home and school but from the larger society, and this knowledge is reinforced through toys and books, movies, and television. No child is too small to pick up the clues--intentional slurs and subtle suggestions--that just as surely tell what blacks, Native Americans, Chicanos, or just plain men and women are and do--and thus what they can't become or can't accomplish. Books, perhaps children's books most of all, are powerful tools by which a civilization perpetuates its values--both its proudest accomplishments and its most crippling prejudices. In books children find characters with whom they identify and whose aspirations and actions they might one day try to emulate; they discover, too, a way of perceiving those who are of a different color, who speak a different language or live a different life. Heroic epics, schoolbook histories, timeless fairy tales all help to inspire pride and ambition, fear, and defeatism.

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What are common themes which are stereotyped? Those listed below are examples, but not exhaustive.

STEREOTYPES FOUND IN EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL

Common Themes:

- Ethnic
- Racial
- Sexual Identity

Avoided Themes:

- Age
- Handicap

Devalued Themes:

- Recovered Alcholics
- Mental Patients
- Vietnam Veterans
- Homosexual Preferences
- Religious Minorities

The guidelines proposed can apply most aptly to the stereotypes of race, sex, ethnic identity and handicapping condition. Therefore, the blanks can be filled in with "who are black, who are female, who are Italian, who are crippled" for example. These guides apply to illustrations and photographs as well as printed materials.

Many guidelines to aid publishers in preventing bias have been developed to assure fair representation of ethnic groups, both sexes and handicapped persons. Below the guidelines of one group (National Center on Education Media and Materials for the Handicapped) have been generalized to apply to any group against which there is bias. The reader is invited to fill in the blanks to represent the common themes listed earlier.

Guideline 1

In print and non print educational materials _____ percent of the contents should include or represent children or adults who _____.

Consider:

At lease one out of ten persons is handicapped. At least 50% of people are women. 10% of the population is black. The average age of the United States' population is getting higher. With regard to sexism in materials, most texts are guilty of omission rather than commission (APA Task Force).

With regard to handicapped persons, most people are astounded to know that they make up more than 10% of the population by school age, and a higher percentage as the population ages.

Percentage of Handicapped School Aged Children by Disability*

Speech Impaired	3.5%
Emotionally Disturbed	2.0%
Mentally Retarded	2.3%
Learning Disabled	3.0%
Hard of Hearing	.5%
Deaf	.075%
Crippled or Other Health Impairment	.5%
Visually Impaired	.1%
Multihandicapped	.06%
	12.035%

*Figures supplied by the U.S. Office of Education 1976.

Guideline 2

Representation of persons of _____ should be included in materials at all levels (early childhood through adult) and in all areas of study such as:

Career Education	Mathematics
Health Studies	Physical Education
Language Arts	Science
Vocational Education	Social Studies

For example, a unit on physical education can cover the development of sports for people who compensate in many ways. Sports for people with physical handicaps together with Special Olympics for people who are mentally retarded can be documented. Skiers and horsemen from the National Matter of Inconvenience Group also provide representation of athletic options available to people with handicaps.

Units on science may also directly relate to disabling conditions. Hardwared of prostheses and communicative devices are fascinating to study and exemplary of the advanced science and technology of the space age. For example, one can explain workings of the hearing aid as a science or electronics project. Surgical and medical procedures associated with various impairments beautifully illustrate biological principles. One can use artifical limbs and other prosthetic devices for illustrations in areas of physics, engineering, physical education, and hygiene.

Courses in family life, ethics, and social studies are actually incomplete without consideration of human variation, ways of coping with adversity, and social management of differences perceived as deviance. Architectural modifications in designing accessible buildings and convenient interior spaces is also relevant and timely.

In language arts, a unit on communication would not be complete without consideration of alternative systems such as American Sign Language.

In career education and vocational education, the contributions for and by persons with handicaps might include Alexander Graham Bell, whose wife was deaf, Ray Charles, the blind, black musician, Steinmetz, the crippled inventor, Helen Keller, and a host of others.

Guideline 3

The representation of persons with _____ should be accurate and free from stereotypes.

How many times have we read of the principal "he", the teacher "she" to the detriment of female principals and male teachers.

Speaking of people as "the Mexicans, the women, the retarded" imples a monolithic group.

Within an individual category of handicap, there is wide variation in severity. Few visually impaired people lack all vision, use guide dogs, or have musical talents. It is unrealistic to present all visually impaired poeple in such stereotypic roles.

The use of categorical labels has several negative outcomes, but one of the most derogatory practices is to make these descriptors into nouns, thus equating devaluation with individual differences. People with handicapping conditions should not be referred to by using noun phrases such as epileptics, wheelchair people, CPs, LDs, trainables.

Guideline 4

Persons of _____ should be shown participating in activities in a manner that will include them as full participating members of society.

The purpose of this guideline is to overcome the impression presently embedded in educational materials that all people are average, and that most social and career roles are culturally bound.

Are women always shown as secretaries, nurses, serving meals?

Are janitors, dish washers shown as persons of color?

Are deaf persons shown only in the company of other deaf persons? Are all retarded persons shown in institutions or going places only in groups?

Feature writers for newspapers often portray explicit surprise in writing about women, blacks or disabled individuals who are discovered performing jobs that are assumed to be held only by persons of traditional identities.

A "gee whiz" tone of writing is a veiled insult because it assumes the accomplishment of _____ persons are flukes....noteworthy becuase of extreme improbability.

Guideline 5

In describing persons who are _____, the language used should be nondiscriminatory and free from value judgements.

Examples:

"confined to a wheelchair"

or

"uses a wheelchair"

"suffering from epilepsy"

or

"experiences siezures"

Although a woman, she works in a foundry

The woman surgeon

The surgeon, who happens to be a woman

Materials aimed at young children need careful editing to eliminat unnecessary reinforcement of stereotypes during critical stages of attitude development. How many comic strips or comic books constantly refer to "dummy," "idiot," or "moron?" How many comic strips feature central characters who appear intellectually slower than other figures such as Zero in Beetle Bailey? (See Weinberg & Rossini, 1978.) Images, expectancies, and labels of devaluation are constant themes in preschool literature. Is it surprising that children during those years love to tell riddles and jokes about morons when the media bombards them with degradation of intellectual slowness?

Words that devalue groups of persons are common. Below are some that refer specifically to handicaps, but the reader can fill in many about ethnic, racial groups, women, and homosexuals.

Words that Devalue Intellectual Handicaps

Dummy, dumb act, dumb bunny

Idiot, imbecile, moron

A ding a ling

A ree tard

A lame brain

Dim wit, simpleton, bird brain

Mongolian idiot

A mental

Words That Devalue Emotional Problems

Crazies, Are you Crazy?

Mad scientist, coo coo bird

Became unhinged, unglued,

wacky, nutty

Words That Devalue Epilepsy

Had a fit or spells

Convulsed with laughter

Pitch a fit

Foamed at the mouth with rage

Words That Devalue Physical Stature

A dwarfed personality

Runt of the litter

A little man

A shrimp

90 lb. weeakling

Words That Devalue Orthopedic Handicaps

A cripple

Crooked deals

Lame duck candidates

One armed bandit

A basket case

Clobbered kids

Pigeon toed

A spineless person

Words That Devalue Sensory Impairments

Deaf and dumb

Turn a deaf ear

Deaf to reason

Mocks the dull ear of time

Lacking vision

Blind to the possibilities

Myopic point of view

Blind rage

Evil eye

Blind as a bat

Fish eye

Cold look

Guideline 6

Persons who are _____ and persons who are not _____ should be shown interacting in ways that are mutally beneficial.

Are woman, children, and old people always shown being helped by others rather than vice versa? Do materials shown positive interpersonal relationships between persons with and without exceptionalities?

Do your materials show persons of different races communicating naturally without embarrassing awkwardness?

Educational materials should stress the benefit of mutuality and open, respectful encounter between peers with varying characteristics.

Guideline 7

Materials should provide a variety of appropriate role models of persons who are _____.

Whatever the group chosen, it is easy to list representatives well known persons who possess this characteristic.

Have the materials explored the full range of jobs that persons with various characteristics ties do perform, or are they limited to a narrow range of occupations?

Have you ever depicted persons of these groups as parents, community leaders, or business executives?

Do you depict the typical achiever, as well as the super achiever, as a role model?

Another type of subtle degradation of women or of persons with handicaps is the inclusion of statements about their associations with men or nonhandicapped friends or spouses. Writers may feel compelled to report whether a disabled person's spouse is normal, or how many children a woman or handicapped person has. Why should procreation be essential to self worth for handicapped people or women any more than for others?

Guideline 8

Emphasis should be on uniqueness and worth of all persons, rather than on the differences between persons who _____ and persons who are not _____.

Do materials foster the appreciation of similarities between persons with and without exceptionalities? Or

Does the material foster the attitude of "one of them" as opposed to "one of us?"

Avoid unnecessary expressions such as "John Jones, a paraplegic" in the same way you avoid "John Jones, a Presbyterian".

Guideline 9

Tokenism should be avoided in the representation of _____.

Place the individuals in the picture without placing them in the background, and without featuring them only as tokens. Choose settings that positively reflect the underlying values of physical, social, and temporal integration. Capture the human qualities with the right exposure of light and without an angle of deviancy.

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